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UNCLAS DJIBOUTI 001163

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: THE MOOD IN SOMALILAND IS DEFIANT, YET APPREHENSIVE

1. Summary. An embassy Djibouti FSN recently returned from several weeks leave in Hargeisa, Somaliland. He reported an active interest there in the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference that is taking place in Nairobi, but rejection of any effort by the conference or subsequently by the international community to subsume the sovereignty of Somaliland. Yet Hargeisa's mood was also one of apprehension, of not knowing what may happen. Additionally, the government of Somaliland left the door open a crack stating that it would consider dialogue with any new Mogadishu based regime. End summary.

2. Background. British Somaliland became independent on June 26, 1960 and was acknowledged by 34 nations, including the U.S. Five days later on July 1, it voluntarily joined with Italian Somalia to form the Republic of Somalia. The union worked satisfactorily until the Siad Barre regime in the seventies and eighties cracked down harshly on northerners using the full police and military might of the capital. In the anarchy that followed Siad's demise in 1991, Somaliland reclaimed its independence, affirmed by a national referendum. A functioning government that controls national territory has existed since that time, but the Somaliland state has not been recognized by any government.

3. The IGAD led effort to reconstitute a viable government in Mogadishu culminated in the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference in Nairobi that is just winding up with the swearing-in of a Parliament. Selection of a president is still to come. On July 17, 2003 when the SNRC was being contemplated, the Somaliland Ministry of Foreign Affairs endorsed the event and exhorted all factions and groups in "Somalia" (meaning the former Italian colony) to participate. The Ministry added that "Any claims or declarations of sovereignty over Somaliland by a future Somalia authority will be viewed by the Government of Somaliland as an indication of hostile intent." However, it added that officials in Somaliland "do not eliminate the possibility of dialogue with Somalia as equal partners."

4. Somaliland officials gave our FSN a copy of the July 17, 2003 declaration last week and told him that it remained the policy of the government. He was asked to communicate this information to embassy Djibouti. A copy of the document was faxed to AF/E.

5. Our source reported that the Nairobi Reconciliation Conference was the hottest topic in the streets of Hargeisa. Youth are ready to take arms to defend their nation whereas wiser citizens seek other means to preserve the peace that has come in last ten years. Folks displayed sadness over non-recognition of Somaliland by the world at large and especially efforts by Djibouti to prevent that from happening. Most agreed that any undertakings to compel Somaliland to unite with Somalia would be unfair and rebuffed.

6. Despite this bravado, our source concluded that Somalilanders are uncertain about the future and fear that in the existing limbo Somaliland's territorial integrity and sovereignty risk being chipped away. Apparently two of Somaliland's six regions, Sanag and Sool, are showing signs of disunity. Sanag is discontent with Hargeisa's rule while Sool appears to be shifting its allegiance to Puntland.

7. Comment: Embassy notes that this is second hand reporting. Nonetheless, we judge it helps fill the void of information about what is going on in Somaliland, so we convey it in that spirit.
GRIBBIN